COMMUNION MEDITATION - World Communion
My Peace I Leave With You
Micah 4:1-4; John 14:27
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It is there from the beginning. It is part of the Paradise we lost in the Garden of Eden. It is so devastatingly simple we have no single word to encompass it. In Hebrew, the word is Shalom. It takes twenty different Greek words, and in English it is so difficult that no one has bothered to count. The closest, the best is "Peace".

Devastatingly simple. It is the Garden of Eden. It is the way God intended the creation to be. It is human beings acting, relating, living, according to the intent of the creator. It is comfort, at ease, at-homeness with the world, others, self. It is a symphony orchestra playing purely in tune. It is the symmetry of large oak - it is the perfect rainbow which stood over our city at 7:30 this A.M. It is everything in proper relationship: sun, moon, birds, fish, animals, plants, men, women, children - all growing and being as God intended it. The idea is devastatingly simple: almost childlike.

Adult reality is East of Eden. The way it is this side of Paradise is division, conflict, competition, winning and losing, alienation, misunderstanding. "War may be hell", but war is at the heart of life outside the garden: war as supreme goal for which we happily spend dollars we haven't even earned yet, and was as metaphor for that dis-ease inside, that empty space of the spirit our poets and artists keep punctuating: that divide in our own hearts between the person we know we can be and the person we are: that gap between us and one we really mean to love and touch and treat kindly: that theological vacuum between the reality of me and the reality we call God, that restless battle between faith and cynicism - belief and doubt - trust and despair. War is metaphor for what happens inside: a stunning idea psychologists have been borrowing for centuries from its first century, tent-maker author named Paul.

Part of what God built into His creation was a primal knowledge that peace is the norm, that all else is aberation. And part of what He planted deeply in the soul of His own called people was the frustrating burden of a dream of peace: Shalom, at-homeness. And part of that people's legacy was impatience with no peace. The dream lived with them. It grew with them and took shape in their experience. Contours of peace were formed in Egypt when slaves, incapable of waging war, knew intuitively that servitude is not peace. Through years of wandering and centuries of fighting they sang about it and hoped for it. To read their literature is to be blessed by it, breaking through in unlikely places like a bright crocus on a gray February morning...

"How good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity
It is like the precious oil upon the head,
running down upon the beard,
upon the beard of Aaron
running down on the collar of his robes." (Psalm 133:1 RSV).

When it happened in their tortured history they recognized it and knew it to be a gift of God. Strange, compelling, poets reminded them in the darkest moments of all that peace is the steady norm in God's creation. Prophets they were called, and they spoke and wrote and scolded and inspired in those very moments when sensible people are wringing their hands...when the invading army is at the gate, when

the infant has died, when the temple is leveled, when the crops are failing...

"He will settle disputes among nations...
They will hammer their swords into plows
and their spears into pruning knives..." (Micah 4:3)

When the Roman Eagle conquered all, when the world lay under the Peace of Rome which was really peace for no one but Rome, an age-old pining for God's Messiah was shaded with a new emphasis. "When he comes," they whispered in their shadowy synagogues so the Legionnaire on guard couldn't hear: "When the Messiah comes, there will be peace."

Angels sang at His birth "Peace on earth, good will...do not be afraid." He gave it to those who knew Him. He gave it to tormented women and arrogant defensive landlords; He brought peace to fishermen and soldiers. When they talked about Him they talked about peace. "Peace be with you," He said when they encountered Him after resurrection. The word - the idea - became greeting and benediction for all those who followed.

"He is our peace," the early church said, and they needed to say no more.

When Jesus used the word, it was not an easy, superficial peace. "My own peace I give you, not as the world gives," He said to His disciples an hour before He was arrested and dragged off to a stacked tribunal in the dead of night. "Peace I leave with you," He said about eighteen hours before He was executed by the state as a disturber of it. Those people to whom He gave peace were hounded, chased, arrested, tortured, killed, and so when He said Peace it wasn't a simple, superficial thing.

It isn't an easy word. It's as full of irony today as it was that night the crucified handed it out to His dinner guests. We still ask a team of six surgeons to labor all day to add a few years to the life of one individual, at the same time we ask tens of thousands of our brightest and best to devise more thorough methodologies for killing our enemies. It's not simple at all. We do not forget, in fact, in spite of churchy rhetoric that Mr. Chamberlin was entirely sincere and that his "peace in our time" was not purchased by weakness for more than a few months.

"My peace I leave with you" and that equates with "peace of mind", whose merchants would sell it like laundry detergent. But we know, you and I, the struggle and turmoil of the heart. We know, though confess it to none, that alienation and lostness are more the status quo than at-homeness. We know that superficial peace is no peace.

It is what we lost at Eden. It is available as gift. When it happens, it is grace. A contemporary, a Presbytery laywoman...

"Simply, we are to be friends...At the heart of the mystery
of peace is loving friendship. God's friendship for us, our
friendship for each other, extended to include the whole world."
(A.D.Magazine, 9/81, p.48,Barbara Gerlach).

It is not a footnote. It is not the most recent creation of ecclesiastical bureaucrats in New York. It is most certainly not the private hobby of those ideologically inclined. It is what God meant when He said, "Let there be light and life." It is why the Word became flesh. It is how Word still becomes flesh frequently enough to make cynics into dreamers once again.

He is our peace. That is the word. The gift. How inappropriate to make a gift into anything else. How inappropriate to do anything - but receive it and hold it tightly and be grateful for it.

(Micah 4:1-4)

In days to come the mountain where the Temple stands
will be the highest one of all,
towering above all the hills.
Many nations will come streaming to it,
and their people will say,
"Let us go up the hill of the Lord,
to the Temple of Israel's God.
For he will teach us what he wants us to do;
we will walk in the paths he has chosen.
For the Lord's teaching comes from Jerusalem;
from Zion he speaks to his people."
He will settle disputes among the nations,
among the great powers near and far.
They will hammer their swords into plows
and their spears into pruning knives.
Nations will never again go to war,
never prepare for battle again.
Everyone will live in peace
among his own vineyards and fig trees,
and no one will make him afraid.
The Lord Almighty has promised this.

(John 14:27)

"Peace is what I leave with you;
it is my own peace that I give you.
I do not give it as the world does.
Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid."

Amen.